

## ***Interim Minister, Jesus Christ***

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When I was a kid, I used to love to climb things. Anything. Trees, monkey bars, cyclone fences, gutter pipes, hills, kitchen counters

I was great at getting cookies out of those jars.

As an adult, the higher and the closer to the edge – the better. I remember a view along the NC Appalachian Trail a few years back, Bald's Peak. When I looked out – I was stunned into silence at the vastness and beauty. This is where God is, I thought.

Whatever was inside of me knew what was outside of me on the edge of that majestic vista...and I was observing in a way I had never known before.

Knowing God is all about this morning's readings.

Genesis 15 that Richard read for us is a very old and redacted text, indicating the hands of many scribes during the different periods of Israel's history.

You know the influences:

**J:** (Jayve) From about 950 – 925 BCE, the time in which God was referred to LORD

**E:** From about 900-850 BCE, during which God is Elohim

**J & E:** 722-609 BCE

King Sargon II of Assyria and his capture of the northern kingdom of Israel; the J texts being forced into the same place of the E texts in Judah, producing a blending of both over time.

**D:** Deuteronomic influence in 628-576 BCE – following the discovery of the scroll in the temple wall during renovation – Josiah's reform.

**Captivity:** 586 – 536 BCE – the texts were influenced again by captivity and life within Babylonia

**P:** 550 – 450 BCE, attributed to the rise of the priests in running the temple after the captivity had ended. It was during this time, around 444BCE that the public reading of the **J-E-D-P** document took place, proclaimed as the official version of the Torah, the form that exists to this present day.

Reminder: These texts were never written to be historical documents, but documents about God's relationship with the Jews.

Righteousness ... which later would come to mean following God's laws...

Yet, in this morning's readings, there are no laws for Abraham to follow. He was made righteous by his inner attitude toward God. Sometimes an inner attitude that has no words to describe itself accurately.

It is no coincidence, I think, that on the same day of this reading in the Christian Lectionary, our Jewish sisters and brothers celebrate Purim – the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month Adar. Purim is one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination.

The story is told in the Book of Esther. The heroes of the story are Esther, a beautiful young Jewish woman living in Persia, and her cousin Mordecai, who raised her as if she were his daughter. Esther was taken to the house of Ahasuerus, King of Persia, to become part of his harem. King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than his other women and made Esther queen, but the king did not know that Esther was a Jew, because Mordecai told her not to reveal her identity. It can be dangerous to be out.

The villain of the story is Haman, an arrogant, egotistical advisor to the king. Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, so Haman plotted to destroy the Jewish people. In the end, Mordecai convinces Esther to go before the King and tell him what was going on and asking for him to intervene. Mordecai persuaded Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jewish people.

This, too, was a dangerous thing for Esther to do, because anyone who came into the king's presence without being summoned could be put to death, and she had not been summoned.

Esther fasted for three days to prepare herself, then went into the king. Esther, definitely a woman of courage.

He welcomed her. Later, she revealed herself to her king and told him of Haman's plot against her people. The Jewish people were saved, and Haman was hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

And such was the cause for great celebration and the festive nature of Purim.

And more...the book of Esther is unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible that does not contain the name of God. In fact, it includes virtually no reference to

God. Mordecai makes a vague reference to the fact that the Jews will be saved by someone else, if not by Esther, but that is the closest the book comes to mentioning God. So, one important message that can be gained from the story is that God often works in ways that are not apparent, in ways that appear to be chance, coincidence or ordinary good luck.

The First or Old Testament – not everything is always about law and hardly anything is about exact history (whatever that might be).

The FT/OT is about God's interaction with the people, and in the case of Abram it produced a covenant ritual (most likely derived by Israel from the cult of Baal-berith at Schehem).

And we then return to Luke for this morning's gospel.

When I took the courses to be certified as an interim minister in the Presbytery of Hudson River, we studied biblical examples or parallels of interim ministers. Many would say that Jesus, himself, was an interim minister. He was the transition from what had become a heavily laden law based tradition of the Jews, at the expense of the early practices described in Genesis.

In a way, Jesus tried to clear away some of the subtle and nuanced changes that had changed the meaning of things like righteousness, and help to shift them back to the real meaning practice of one's relationship with God through a radical, compassionate, and just hospitality.

It's a little different than today's parish work as an interim, but the parallel and the model is there for speaking truth in a way that helps to make things clear so that we can maintain the right relationship with our God and with one another. Jesus never explained a thing – but he stirred up the heart and the mind – opening both to the movement of the Spirit.

And he could be feisty – as radicals often are:

Those who warned Jesus in this morning's readings were most likely men friendly to him, telling him he'd better get out of town because Herod has had enough of him and his challenges and is ready to quiet him by death.

But Jesus is clear, he will not interrupt his work out of fear or for the discomfort he causes the rulers. Herod is not his ruler. (Remember the revolution of baptism?)

However, Jesus is aware of just how dangerous this view of God and the edge – how dangerous it is becoming. Nonetheless, Jesus steps up to Herod, sending the message that he will finish his work and then leave. Truth, spoken with conviction to power.

Here, too, there are additions to the text. The prediction of the crucifixion, is so specific, that it was probably added at a later date – in attempt to confirm Jesus as a prophet. The utterances to the Pharisees are considered to be Jesus’.

Throughout all the texts and the celebration of Purim, there are several threads we could follow. For now, I’ll stay with the triumph over fear and the affirmation that God cannot be captured, painted, or confined to text.

Ultimately, I think, the pointers of others’ faith journeys along with our own growing sense of God in all of our sight – is the message and the truth. As difficult as it is sometimes to see clearly, as painful or oppressive as the truth may be – these stories tell us that there is no other path for righteousness than the ones that bring us to the very edge of where who we are meets the God within and without us.

That is a view, a long magnificent view that I one day hope to see. The previews have been spectacular, to say the least.

Amen.